Interim Charge 4

Study the prevalence of online courses and degrees in higher education. Examine how institutions providing online courses and programs are accredited, particularly courses and programs originating from states other than Texas. Evaluate how students whose courses and degrees are primarily online perform in terms of persistence and degree completion versus students who take courses in traditional classroom settings. Study labor market outcomes for students with primarily online courses and degrees versus more traditional programs.

1. What are the existing barriers to online learning for students and faculty? What have institutions done to alleviate and eliminate these barriers?

- **Barriers for Students**
  - **Many low-income students do not have internet access and do not have a tablet or laptop computer that are essential for online learning. In addition, greater opportunity to internet access, and low-cost mobile devices are a much-needed asset for student success.**
- **Barriers for Faculty**
  - **One of the biggest barriers for faculty is a historical trend to promote and maximize in-person engagement and student-faculty engagement. Faculty need to be trained to use technology in combination with the best pedagogical practices to be effective online instructors. The best online education providers require instructors to be certified to teach online.**
- **Alleviating Barriers**
  - **Several institutions in the United States have developed mobile device initiatives over the last decade to make it easier for students to access courses and learning materials. This includes providing loaner laptops, tablets, and mobile hotspots to students that may not be able to afford these technologies on their own.**
  - **Increasing the number and strength of Wi-Fi spots on and near campus.**
  - **Incorporating new orientation and training to teach students how to best learn online.**
  - **In addition, please see question #9 on OER.**

2. What information and data is available regarding long-term student success for those taking courses primarily online -- both in general and specific to Texas institutions?

Allen and Seaman's (2013) longitudinal research reported that most chief academic officers rate the learning outcomes for online education "as good as or better" than those for face-to-face instruction. In the first report of this series in 2003, 57.2 percent of academic leaders rated the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face classes. That number is now 77.0 percent. (Source: http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/changingcourse.pdf)

TSUS Performance Metrics	2010	2019	% Change
Online Degree Programs	32	159	397%
Online Credit Hours	38,700	191,600	395%
Online Degrees Awarded	0	4,200	

3. With institutions having shifted instruction to online-only in the Spring of 2020 because of the pandemic, what lessons have been learned?

Our faculty, students, and campus leadership are amazingly nimble and flexible in terms of making major changes in short period of time – TSUS faculty converted over 12,000 course section during the Spring 2020 semester to help students graduate and continue with their academic programs. Higher education institutions that have grown their online capacity and expertise over last 10 years. Specifically, at SHSU and Lamar where 25-40% of the student credits hours are generated online already and will likely come out of the crisis in a stronger market position. Even institutions who did not have a lot of faculty teaching online programs, exposure to remote learning and other new teaching and learning technology provided a surprising boost to these faculty's productivity, and it appears that a number of faculty were positively swayed to the merits and benefits of online learning in the process. Enhancements to technology to do online learning is not cheap, and additional costs of professional development, software licenses, online support structures, new cameras and other technology are all needed to provide a high-quality online experience.

4. What are the challenges related to technology, quality, accessibility or other considerations? The Committee is seeking the perspectives of college/university administration, faculty and students.

Challenges include selecting and procuring software, hardware, and technologies to use when implementing distance education or remote learning. Many of these tools are very expensive compared to traditional face-to-face instruction and many institutions did not have funds allocated for these tools. Understanding what products to use is a challenge for most institutions, because procuring software and technology takes time and many institutions did not have the luxury of time in the midst of COVID-19. Institutions need an integrated and common suite of enterprise technologies, including learning management systems, proctoring software, ADA compliance software, and 24x7 help desk support.

5. Post-pandemic, will the recent shift to online courses lead to expanded online demand and capacity?

Initially, it does appear that there will be expanded online demand and capacity. For example, more adult learners will be seeking online opportunities to upskill and complete new degree and credential programs online. Additionally, distance education enrollments have increased for 14 years in a row (Source: https://49hk843qjpwu3gfmw73ngy1k-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/OCS-2019-FINAL-WEB-Report.pdf)

With a significantly larger percent of the labor market getting used to working online or remotely, this will increase people's confidence to continue their education as well in the online environment.

Prior to the pandemic, TSUS was the leading university system in Texas with 15% of its student fully online (12,600 students out of 85,000) compared with UT System (13%), Texas A&M System (10%), UNT System (10%), Texas Tech System (9%), and Univ. of Houston System (7%). In addition, early indicators are that students and institutions are increasing online and hybrid capacity to support changing supply and demand:

TSUS Course Modality	Fall 2019	Estimated Fall 2020

Face-to-Face	**79%**	**46%**
Hybrid	**3%**	**26%**
Fully Online	**18%**	**28%**

For example, Sam Houston State University reported a nearly 20% increase in fully online enrollments in Fall 2020 to 4,400 students, from 3,700 in Fall 2019. It is also very important to distinguish between true online learning in higher education versus what many students experienced in the spring, which was emergency remote learning. There is a big difference in terms of quality, underlying institutional investments, and ultimately student engagement and success.

6. How can the Legislature address gaps in equity in accessing reliable, affordable Internet access?

Texas State University System would like to thank the Governor, Congressional leaders, Texas Legislature, and Coordinating Board leadership with helping fill some gaps in the state financial aid budget recently with CARES Act funding, which will help address equity gaps in the short-term. However, moving forward into the next legislative session, even though the state budget will be significantly constrained, it will be very important for Texas to maintain strong education funding at all levels so the state is well positioned from a training and quality workforce. Making sure all regions of the state have equal access to high-speed internet, for both students and employees needing to work remotely is vital for current and future prosperity of Texas. Where additional state and federal resources, and the appropriate stacking of these resources can be leveraged to help eliminate gaps and increased online capacity, the better off Texas will be in both the short-term and long-term.

TSUS's state colleges in Southeast Texas (Lamar Institute of Technology, Lamar State College Orange, and Lamar State College Port Arthur) are great examples of an amazing return on investment over the past couple years. Due to additional state support provided by the Legislature, Chancellor McCall and the TSUS Board were able to dramatically reduce tuition rates at our State Colleges, which has paid off with tremendous gains in enrollment over past years (about a 20% gain in enrollment in two years), which is changing the college going culture in Southeast Texas, which in both the short-term and long-term, will help decrease equity gaps and increase the quality of life and standard of living of Texans.

7. What sort of differences in quality are we seeing for online nursing programs without a clinical component versus those that do have one or are done in person?

Clinical components of nursing programs, at the associate, bachelor's, and graduate level have been and will continue to be done predominantly in-person. With advancements in health and education related technology, there are portions or certain types of clinical labs or hands-on skills that may be informed by 3D visualizations, holograms, or other forms of virtual reality that assist with teaching and learning, but the upfront and recurring maintenance of these new technologies may be cost prohibitive to many standard nursing programs across the state. Online nursing programs are typically the RN to BSN program, whereby only students who already have the clinical experience needed to be a nurse are admitted (many with Associate Degrees in Nursing), which then allows students to complete the remaining health and administrative courses for the bachelor's degree program online.

8. What sort of privacy exists for students utilizing some of the more popular online curriculum packages?

Institutions utilize annual training in data and information security and ongoing training in cyber-security to support student privacy concerns and to educate students on security/privacy issues involved in online learning. All higher education institutions utilize multi-layered security and authentication protocols that could include the following: special login credentials, two-step verification, requirement of "strong" passwords, facial recognition, and other forms of biometric authentications (e.g., fingerprints, thumbprints, retina scans, etc.).

The right to prevent unwanted disclosure of personal information to others has been, and will continue to be, an important security and privacy concern for higher education institutions. On a regular basis, institutions and the system review contracts and vendors to make sure personal student data is not used in any prohibited ways and is compliant with various FERPA guidelines.

9. Has recently adopted legislation on Open Educational Resources been able to make an impact on the quality of online education yet?

COVID-19 has increased some urgency on the part of Texas colleges and universities to more aggressively look at low and no-cost educational resources that could be used in the classroom to help reduce the cost of college textbooks. The use of open educational resources has expanded dramatically across Texas public higher education over past 5-10 years, savings students and families millions of dollars and the current health crisis creates even greater urgency to ramp-up these efforts. For example, a recent [OER report on statewide usage in Texas](), published by the Digital Higher Education Consortium of Texas, indicate that over 50% of institutions in the state either have formal OER policies or programs in place, or are in the process of developing them, and another nearly 40% are interesting in doing so. TSUS also is in the process of developing a systemwide repository of OER resources at the institution, state, and national level, to help promote and encourage the use across TSUS. In addition, there are plans to work with system institutions to submit applications for the new THECB OER Grant Program, that will provide a maximum of $25,000 per institution to help increase use of OER and decrease the cost of learning materials for students.

Other recent examples of TSUS increased interest in OER is evidenced by Texas State University recent formation of a Managing Textbook Costs committee that is incorporating OER and affordable learning materials in their discussions, inclusion of OER in strategic planning efforts, as well as better communication by the Registrar related to courses that utilize low- or no-cost learning materials. In addition, at institutions like Sam Houston State University and Lamar State College Orange, libraries are helping coordinate and take control of campus OER efforts and are helping to promote usage by faculty and track cost savings for students.

10. Do small and rural community colleges have the financial capability to switch to online, as well as in-person, classes, degrees, etc.?

TSUS has four smaller enrollment institutions in its system (Sul Ross State University with campuses in Alpine, Del Rio, Eagle Pass and Uvalde), Lamar Institute of Technology in Beaumont, Lamar State College Orange, and Lamar State College Port Arthur), several in rural parts of the state (SRSU and LSCO), and there is no question that these types of institutions traditionally have less financial

capacity to switch to online learning. However, due to their rural nature, Sul Ross State University and its campuses in Alpine, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, and Uvalde, as well as Lamar State College Orange, have increased their online capabilities over the past 10 years to better serve the students and families in West Texas and Southeast Texas. An enormous benefit of being in a university system, for both public 4-year and 2-year institutions is the ability to share services, particularly as it relates to technology and online education. Over the past 5 years, TSUS's Chief Online Education, Dr. Bill Angrove, who also is Vice President for Online Education at Sam Houston State University, has aggressively worked with smaller enrollment institutions in our system (which could easily be expanded to other small, rural community colleges) to **share services with SHSU** in the following areas: learning management system, instructional designers, video capture software, ADA compliance software, 24/7 technology hotline services, among others.

11. How does the impact of COVID-19 affect the small and rural community college's ability to offer online classes and make other changes to adapt to the pandemic?

N/A